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Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------130818 151556Z /46
P 151511Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9328
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 9290

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: EG, IS, XF
SUBJ: BEGIN-SADAT DIALOGUE AND ITS IMPACT ON ISRAEL

REF: TEL AVIV 9166

SUMMARY: THE BEGIN-SADAT "DIALOGUE" DEVELOPED AT A TIME WHEN ISRAELIS WERE BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DELAYS IN ARAB RESPONSES TO THE U.S.-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER AND ABOUT THE NATURE OF U.S.-ARAB DISCUSSIONS. IT ALSO COINCIDED WITH VARIOUS PUBLIC HINTS OF POSSIBLE CHANGES IN PROCEDURES FOR GETTING TO GENEVA. PUBLICLY THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUED FIRMLY TO INSIST ON ADHERENCE TO THE "ISRAELI-AMERICAN BILATERAL AGREEMENT" (I.E., THE U.S.-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER). BUT THE SADAT INITIATIVE HAS COMPLICATED ISRAELI TACTICS, NOT LEAST BECAUSE IT HAS BEGUN TO UNFREEZA
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HABITUAL PUBLIC ATTITUDES OF DISTRUST OF THE GENUINESS OF ARAB DESIRES FOR PEACE. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH THE DRAMATIC SADAT/BEGIN PUBLIC EXCHANGES NOW HEIGHTENING THE AIR OF EXPECTANCY HERE THAT SOMETHING MOMENTOUS MAY BE ABOUT TO OCCUR, IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO REVIEW THE IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING EVENTS. LAST WEEK WAS QUITE A WEEK IN ISRAEL

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FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY. SADAT'S "WORKING GROUP" PROPOSAL AND BRZEZINSKI'S SULZBERGER INTERVIEW WERE BOTH PROMPTLY SHOT DOWN BY BEGIN AND DAYAN. PRESS REACTION WAS DECIDEDLY MORE MIXED. WHILE THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS, PREDICTABLY, SUPPORTED THE GOV-ERNMENT, MORE MODERATE PAPERS WERE LESS CERTAIN HOW TO REACT. THEY QUESTIONED WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE RESPONDED SO NEGATIVELY AND, SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF PRESS STORIES, SO FORMALLY. A NUMBER OF COMMENTATORS THOUGHT BOTH SADAT'S AND BRZEZINSKI'S IDEAS DESERVED FURTHER THOUGHT. THE RESULT WAS MORE THAN USUAL DISARRAY AND SOUL-SEARCHING IN THE PRESS.

2. BY WAY OF CONTRAST, BEGIN MOVED QUICKLY TO COUNTER SADAT'S DRAMATIC SPEECH OF NOV. 9 OFFERING TO COME TO JERUSALEM IN SEARCH OF PEACE. IN A NOON RADIO INTERVIEW ON NOV. 10; IN HIS BRIEFING FOR CODEL PRICE THAT AFTERNOON; AND IN HIS CLIMACTAC NOV. 11 STATEMENT AND NOV. 12 INVITATION, HE WELCOMED SADAT AND REPEATED HIS OWN EARLIER READINESS TO GO TO CAIRO. HE WAS CLEARLY TRYING TO REGAIN THE PEACE INITITIATIVE. AT THE SAME TIME, HE REJECTED SADAT'S SUBSTANTIVE GOALS AND REAFFIRMED HIS OWN AS FIRMLY AS EVER; AND HE NAILED HIS FLAG MORE SOLIDLY THAN EVER TO THE WORKING PAPER AS AN "ISRAELI-U.S. BILATERAL AGREEMENT," SAYING IT WAS "INCONCEIVABLE" THAT ISRAEL WOULD AGREE TO ANY SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES.

3. AS THE SMOKE FROM LAST WEEK'S VERBAL BARRAGES CLEARS AWAY, IT WOULD BE EASY TO DISMISS THESE EVENTS AS JUST A SERIES OF CONFIDENTIAL

PUBLIC RELATIONS MANEUVERS. THEY LOOK INCREASINGLY LIKE MORE THAN THAT, EVEN IF SADAT WAS TALKING PRIMARILY TO THE OTHER ARABS AND BEGIN, THOUGH ADDRESSING HIMSELF TO THE EGYPTIAN PEOPLE, WAS AIMING ALSO AT ISRAELI AND AMERICAN AUDIENCES.

4. THE BEGIN RESPONSE TO SADAT'S INITIAL STATEMENT WAS READILY UNDERSTANDABLE. THE BIG QUESTIONS HERE IN RECENT DAYS WERE WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON IN THE PROTRACTED ARAB-AMERICAN EXCHANGES ON HOW TO GET TO GENEVA; AND WHAT IS THE PRESENT OUTLOOK FOR THE U.S.-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER (WHICH IN CONTRAST TO ITS ORIGINAL RECEPTION, LOOKS BETTER HERE THE MORE THE ARABS REJECT IT). A MAJOR ISRAELI GOAL REMAINS TO REACH A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH EGYPT IF NOTHING MORE IS POSSIBLE. ANYTHING THAT WOULD GIVE THE ARABS ANOTHER PROCEDURAL OPTION THAN THE WORKING PAPER, OR THREATEN ISRAEL WITH MULTILATERAL RATHER THAN BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ARABS WILL BE TENACIOUSLY RESISTED. A WELL-CONNECTED COMMENTATOR RECENTLY QUOTED DAYAN AS SAYING "THE MOMENT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 9290

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THEY START FINDING OUT WHETHER SADAT'S WORKING GROUP IDEA
IS REAL...THE WORKING PAPER IS DEAD." THE ISRAELIS KNOW THE
WORKING PAPER IS IN TROUBLE; UNTIL THEY LEARN MORE FROM THE
U.S. ABOUT NEXT STEPS, THEY WILL BLOCK ANY OPEN MOVE AWAY FROM IT.

5. THUS FAR, ISRAELI REACTIONS TO VARIOUS PUBLIC HINTS OF CHANGE
IN PROCEDURES FOR GETTING TO GENEVA HAVE BEEN UNCHARACTER-
ISTICALLY MILD. THEY HAVE STUDIOUSLY IGNORED REPORTS COMING
OUT OF CAIRO OF A NEW "ARAB-AMERICAN" FORMULA BASED ON 1973
PROCEDURES. BEGIN'S ONLY COMMENT, AFTER MY LAST MEETING WITH HIM,
WAS THAT IF THERE WERE NEW PROPOSALS, "I CANNOT IMAGINE THAT THE
AMBASSADOR WOULD NOT HAVE SAID A SINGLE WORD TO US ABOUT SUCH
A SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT." THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL REACTION
TO MY LAST CONVERSATION WITH DAYAN ON GEVEVA PROBLEMS (TEL
AVIV 9154) OR DINITZ'S REPORT ON HIS NOV. 10 CONVERSATION WITH
HABIB, ALTHOUGH DAYAN AND BEGIN MUST CERTAINLY SENSE WHAT THESE
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MAY PORTEND. HOWEVER, WE SHOULD EXPECT THEIR REACTION TO ANY
EFFORT TO GIVE THE ARABS AN ESCAPE HATCH FROM THE TERMS OF THE
WORKING PAPER, OR TO ANY U.S. PROPOSAL FOR A NEW PROCEDURAL
APPROACH, TO BE ONE OF SURPRISE, "SHOCK," AND AT LEAST INITIALLY,

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FIRM INSISTENCE ON ADHERENCE TO THE "ISRAELI-AMERICAN BILATERAL AGREEMENT."

6. SADAT'S "GOING TO JERUSALEM" SPEECH COMPLICATED MATTERS FURTHER FOR THE ISRAELIS, PARTICULARLY COMING ON THE SAME DAY AS THE IDF BOMBING OF SOUTHERN LEBANON. THE ISRAELIS CERTAINLY DID NOT INTEND AND WERE UPSET ABOUT THE HEAVY CIVILIAN CASUALTIES. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, BEGIN SEIZED ON THE OPPORTUNITY PROVIDED BY SADAT'S DRAMATIC OFFER, IN ORDER TO REAFFIRM ISRAEL'S DESIRE FOR PEACE AND AN END TO BLOOD.

7. THE SADAT SPEECH, COMING AFTER A WEEK OF DIVIDED OPINION IN ISRAEL ABOUT THE PREVIOUS SADAT STATEMENT AND BRZEZINSKI'S VIEWS ON A POSSIBLE WEST BANK SETTLEMENT, HAS MADE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT HERE, EVEN ON THE MOST SKEPTICAL. THERE REMAINS DEEP DISTRUST OF THE OTHER SIDES' REAL INTENTIONS, AS MUCH IN ISRAEL AS AMONG THE ARABS. NEARLY ALL ISRAELIS, DOVES AS WELL AS HAWKS, PROFOUNDLY DOUBT ANY OF THEIR ARAB NEIGHBORS HAVE GIVEN UP THEIR ULTIMATE DETERMINATION TO DISMANTLE THE JEWISH STATE. YET, AS HAARETZ SAYS, SOME "FEEL THAT SADAT HAS BROKEN A TABOO, AND THAT THIS HAS GREAT SIGNIFICANCE TO THE DEGREE THAT ISRAEL CAN BELIEVE HIS OFT-REPEATED DESIRE FOR PEACE. WHATEVER THE CASE, THESE ARE WORDS THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED." EVEN IF IT IS, AND IS WIDELY SEEN TO BE, PARTLY A PUBLIC RELATIONS CONTEST, A DIALOGUE OF THE KIND BEGIN AND SADAT ARE NOW IN DOES HAVE SOME REAL EFFECT HERE ON HABITUAL ATTITUDES OF DISTRUST.

8. FINALLY, BEHIND ALL THE DIPLOMATIC AND PUBLIC RELATIONS MANEUVERING, THERE IS THE QUESTION OF BEGIN'S OWN REACTION BECAUSE, CONFIDENTIAL

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TO A REMARKABLE DEGREE, HIS PERSONAL REACTIONS NOW DETERMINE ISRAELI POLICY (HE MADE A POINT OF SAYING HE HAD PERSONALLY WRITTEN, IN ENGLISH, HIS REPLY TO SADAT). BEGIN IS QUITE GENUINELY A MAN OF WORDS, IDEOLOGY, AND EMOTION. CERTAINLY SHREWD AS A POLITICIAN, HE IS CHARGED BY ISRAELI CRITICS AS BEING SIMPLISTIC AND IDEOLOGICAL AS A STATESMAN. THERE IS SOMETHING IN THIS VIEW. HE GENUINELY WANTS PEACE (ON HIS OWN TERMS). ARMED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS AND A DEEP DESIRE TO BEQUEATH TO ISRAEL MORE THAN A GENERATION OF PEACE, HE HONESTLY BELIEVES THAT IN A TRUE, DIRECT NEGOTIATION HE CAN BRING THE ARABS TO A SETTLEMENT (PERHAPS A MORE IMAGINATIVE ONE THAT WE CREDIT HIM WITH) WHICH HE CAN THEN PERSUADE HIS PEOPLE TO ACCEPT. PART OF HIS REPLY TO SADAT REFLECTS THAT STRAIN IN HIS CHARACTER.

9. WHATEVER THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF THIS FASCINATING ROUND OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, SADAT HAS STARTED SOMETHING VERY USEFUL TOWARD CONVINCING MANY ISRAELIS THERE IS A GENUINE ARAB DESIRE FOR PEACE, AT LEAST IN EGYPT. AND LAST WEEK'S EXCHANGE STARTED SOME FERMENT HERE WHICH BEGINS TO SHIFT THE DEBATE FOR THE MOVEMENT

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AWAY FROM THE CONSTANT GROOVE IN WHICH THE DIPLOMATIC NEEDLE HAS
BEEN STUCK: FEAR OF AN INDEPENDENT PLO STATE AIMED AT DESTROYING
ISRAEL.
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